

EPISODE 131: TIPS FOR THE TOUGHEST CONVERSATIONS

1. DETERMINE YOUR GOAL

- In any significant endeavor it helps to know your WHY. This is also helpful in high-stakes conversations.
- What is your primary goal for the conversation?
- Ask yourself, is my goal: “To get frustration of my chest? To share a specific request? To share a concern? To have someone understand what I think, feel, want, believe, need?”

2. KNOW WHAT YOU WANT THEM TO DO

- Ask yourself, “What is the big-picture outcome that I desire from this conversation?”
 - Do I want a change in corporate strategy, vision, tactical approach, or engineering approach?
 - Do I want the other person to agree to my specific requests? (immediately or at least consider them)
 - Do I want an apology?
 - Do I want a behavioral change in the other person?
 - Do I want more recognition, authority, or autonomy?

3. DECIDE YOUR RESPONSE STRATEGY

- Ask yourself:
 - Is the person I will speak with able to handle my candor? Will he/she promptly resort to unchecked emotions and self-protection? (For example, some personalities cannot, under any circumstances, accept the slightest blame or responsibility for any problem.)
 - How will I respond if the other person becomes defensive, accusatory, or resorts to silence?
 - What will I do if the other person acknowledges the legitimacy of my requests or concerns, but chooses to ignore or deny them?
 - What will I do if the other person uses their position to dismiss having to take my concerns seriously?
- Are there thresholds of anger, frustration, or candor that I don't want to cross?

4. PREPARE FOR DETOURS

- Ask yourself: “Where is the conversation likely to go off track? What other topics are likely to come up? How will I steer the conversation back?”
- Are there specific questions to ask the person to guide the dialogue and gauge receptivity?
- What tone do you want to use when asking questions?
 - There is a huge difference between a tone of curiosity, or concern, or confrontation.

5. PLAN A GOOD OPENING

- When giving a presentation, your introduction sets the tone and direction of all that you are going to present. The same is true in critical conversations. How you come out of the chutes matters.
- Three things to consider: timing, tone, and content.
- Ask yourself:
 - How will I know when it is time to start the dialogue?
 - Do I know *exactly* how I will begin the conversation? (Consider writing down and practicing your opening sentences.)
 - How do I intend to manage my physiology, emotions, volume, and word choice during the dialogue?

Sources mentioned in this episode:

[Communication Guys, Episode 125: “How to Prepare for Successful Conversations”](#)

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